What Mean Ye by This Service?

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BY

"ELIZABETH"

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"WHAT MEAN YE BY THIS SERVICE?"

"AUNT BETTY! This is the most splendid opportunity for a really serious talk."

"There couldn't be a better, my dear Mollie! Here we sit, beside a glorious fire in my best beloved little sitting-room, and with the assurance that your uncle, bless him! can't get back from the House before midnight. Now, begin: I suppose you are in love again?"

As Lady Benton spoke she glanced up from her knitting, smiling at the girl curled up so gracefully in the big armchair opposite her. But quickly the smile melted into an expression of loving interest, for she saw that Mollie was in earnest.

"Don't joke, Aunt Betty! Since you married Uncle Jack a year ago, I have loved to run in here and talk nonsense, knowing you honestly enjoy hearing of all the cheery times I am having; but during the past few months I

have often longed to ask you about something which means a great deal to you. May I ? "

" Do, Mollie ; you and I are friends."

" Well, Aunt Betty, it is—how can I put it ? Holy Communion seems to be a big Reality to you, and to make a difference in your life. Could you possibly tell me what it does mean to you ? "

Lady Benton put down her knitting and gazed thoughtfully into the fire, wondering how she could find words which would convey to this young girl something of the beauty the wonder, the power, the sufficiency of the Blessed Sacrament. Seeing in her face the difficulty, Mollie leaned forward and, laying one hand on her aunt's knee, said :

" Aunt Betty ! I know enough to be sure you can't express what I want in a few words. What I should really like would be for you to take your Prayer Book and go carefully through the service, telling me just what it means to you."

"Mollie, darling; do you really want that? You would not be bored?"

"No, indeed" said the girl, eagerly rising from her chair and going across to the little bookcase which held Lady Benton's most precious books. Finding, as she expected, a Prayer Book, she did not hand it to her aunt, but, sitting down once more, she opened it herself, saying:

"Perhaps the better plan would be for me to look through the service and ask just what I want to know."

Lady Benton smiled, and said: "It sounds very simple, Mollie; and you seem to have great confidence in my power to solve your difficulties; but, indeed, I do think your plan a good one. Only, you must remember I do not profess to be a theologian, and can only try to tell you simply what the service means to me."

"Yes," said Mollie cheerfully, "that's just what I want."

By this time she had found the place she sought.

" Now, to begin with, we have the Lord's Prayer—that is quite clear, and a very good beginning ; then the prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, no difficulty about that but why, Aunt Betty, do we then proceed to have the Ten Commandments from the old Law ? "

" Many people feel as you do about that, Mollie, but honestly I would hate to leave them out altogether. They make a splendid guide to self examination ; a summary of the least that God has a right to expect in the lives of those who profess to belong to Him. After all, did not Christ endorse every one ? When He said, ' Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,' He simply put in a positive form ' Thou shalt have none other Gods but me.' What we put first in our lives is our God, and many of us are apt to put ' self ' there in one form or another, but it is

one of the most surprising and beautiful of God's many paradoxes that, when we put Him really first and self is truly 'crucified,' self becomes grander and greater, becomes loving, wise, and full of power—in short, 'conformed to His image.'

"The second commandment I paraphrase: 'God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit.'

"The third, 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,' is terribly far-reaching. In our baptism the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost was put upon us, and our lives must therefore inevitably bring either honour or reproach to His name. People who do not know Christ have a right to judge Him by the lives of those who call themselves Christians. St. Paul prayed for his Thessalonian converts 'that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you,' and the possibility of this he expressed when

writing to the Colossians—' Christ in you, the hope of glory.'

" The fourth commandment, I grant you, is rather puzzling for us, for Sunday is not the Sabbath Day. Still, since the Resurrection the Church has decreed that the first day of the week shall be specially ' the Lord's Day,' so we look back to the old Dispensation for guidance as to how God wished His Day observed. We find He meant it to be a day of special remembrance of Him, and of rest for us, and thus a witness to the heathen. Experience has proved how necessary for our physical welfare is this one day of rest in seven ; France, after the Revolution, tried to make one day in ten a holiday, with disastrous effect. But supposing each man determined to take a day of rest when he felt he needed it ; in the first place he would discover it was never convenient to do so ; and secondly, where would be the opportunity for united worship ? When I hear people say they can worship God best

alone in the open country, or on a hill top, and that therefore they no longer go to church, I am amazed ; surely those whose spirits have indeed communed with God under His beautiful trees, or on some glorious mountain top should be the first to wish to meet with others who love Him, that they may offer Him the fuller tribute of united worship. If you found yourself among a number of people who were waiting to honour some man for whom you had neither affection nor respect, their acclamations would only annoy you ; but you remember how you and I felt the day we waited in the crowd to welcome our King and Queen back from Ireland ? The love and loyalty in our hearts rose to fever heat as we joined our cheers with the throng."

" That is very true, Aunt Betty, and I grant you enthusiasm begets enthusiasm ; but suppose on that day we had found ourselves among people who felt no love for our King, and we recognised among them some whom we know

were only there because they considered it was the correct thing to do, or even worse, hoped to gain something by it ? "

" Well ! what then ? Do you suggest if that had been the case we should have felt happier at home ? Would you willingly have foregone an opportunity of offering publicly the homage of your heart because some were there from unworthy motives ? And what of the King ? Would it please him if, when he drove through the streets in state, all his most loyal subjects chose to stay at home, or even to take a solitary walk in the country thinking of him ? "

" Perhaps I have not thought sufficiently of God's side in public worship, but it really does sicken me to see people going regularly to Church Sunday after Sunday, and showing no likeness to Christ at home."

" Do you know, Mollie, I sometimes fancy we judge such people too hardly. We don't know how far worse they might be had they not received some glimpse of God in Church ; nor

do we see the efforts they are perhaps making for a closer walk with God, the remorse and discouragement they may secretly suffer over the very inconsistencies we note so sneeringly.

"But to return to the fourth commandment. The question as to how Sunday can best be spent is only solved in the light of the two com mandments which are now so frequently read at the Eucharist in place of the Ten Commandments; of course they do sum up the ten; —'Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength,' there you get one clue; Sunday must fit you personally for that. 'Love your neighbour as yourself';—that means don't let your rest and recreation involve unnecessary work for others.

"The fifth commandment, 'Honour thy father and thy mother,' evidently meant much to Christ. We are told that as a boy he was subject to St. Mary and St. Joseph, and we know that even the agony of the Cross could not make Him forget to provide a home for His

Mother. Once in His teaching He rebuked those who neglected to supply the needs of their parents on the plea that their money was dedicated to what they considered God's service. But we must realise that this commandment does not necessarily require of us to admire the characters of our parents, for however depraved they may be, they still have a right, as parents, to our respect; and we owe them consideration for their welfare, and even obedience to their commands when these are in no way contrary to what is right. Still, I often think if I were a mother I should pray, whenever I heard this commandment, that I might so live that my children should not find it difficult to honour me.

"Beside the sixth commandment we have only to place the words, 'He that hateth his brother is a murderer,' to realise how much we need it."

"Aunt Betty, that is very drastic. What hope is there for me? I hate so many people."

"Do you mean there are some to whom you would gladly do an injury?"

"Well, no, perhaps not quite that; but there really are some who rub me up the wrong way, and I am quite pleased if I hear others speak slightingly of them.

"Even that must be grievous to God Who is Love, and directly we are conscious of such feelings we should confess them to Him. I believe the remedy is to pray for anyone who so affects us, and try to do them some service. But I do not believe that feeling amounts to hate.

"Perhaps there never was a time when the seventh commandment, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' was more needed; and though many doubtless feel 'this could never be a difficulty to me,' yet I fancy all of us need most earnestly to pray 'incline our hearts to keep this law,' for it includes absolute purity of mind and body.

"'Thou shalt not steal' means to me:

'Don't run up bills which you have not sufficient money to pay,' and also 'Don't keep people waiting for money which is rightly theirs.' The rich are so apt to do this from sheer carelessness.

"The ninth commandment, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour,' most certainly warns us against repeating rumours we have heard and never verified, reports and careless statements which often prove to have little or no foundation ; so easy to start and so very difficult to stop.

"The tenth commandment, 'Thou shalt not covet—' is so obviously still necessary, and indeed seems to contain more of the spirit of the New Testament than of the Old."

"Never again," said Mollie, "will I consider those commandments superfluous. The next prayer is for the King, that I have always loved ; then comes the Creed——"

"Wait a moment, Mollie, you have omitted

the special Collect, Epistle and Gospel for the week."

"So I have; still, you can hardly expound them all to me in one evening," was the laughing rejoinder.

"That is very true; but I do want to say something about them. I suppose there is one central thought connecting the Collect, Epistle and Gospel, and I sometimes wonder how many people take the trouble to search out that thought on Saturdays and make it their own. Supposing every communicant meditated on that one subject day by day through the week, what glorious lights would flash from one mind to another, and year by year the Church would more fully grasp the meaning of the facts there specially singled out, would more vitally 'possess her possessions.' Do you see what I mean? More and more we are learning the influence of one mind over another, the power of thought, and the wonderful effect of united thought.

Take, for example, those marvellous two minutes of silence on November 11th."

"I see," said Mollie thoughtfully, "again that truth of individual responsibility for corporate service."

"Yes. But what were you going to say about the Creed when I interrupted you? Do you want to go into the details of it?"

"No, Aunt Betty; as a matter of fact, I just love the explicit solidity of it. But after it comes the offertory; doesn't that a little jar upon you? it seems so material."

"No, no, Mollie, it means so much. The coin I offer is not only my contribution to the alms, it is a sacrament in itself, an outward and visible sign that all I possess belongs to God; and as the priest offers it at the altar, I pray that I may always remember this fact, and ask that the Master will teach me day by day how my money should be spent for Him. How often we must disappoint Him over this? You see, it is equally important to Him that we buy the

right gown or hat for ourselves; give food to the hungry; flowers to the sick or lonely; amusements to the overworked; or a subscription to foreign missions; it only matters that we seek His will in each act, and do it for love of Him."

"Most assuredly, then, the offertory cannot be omitted. Then comes the prayer for the Church Militant, that always strikes me as splendidly comprehensive; and after that the Invitation, the Confession and Absolution; and then the Comfortable Words."

"Mollie; have you ever noticed the sequence of those Comfortable Words?"

"No."

"The first is an invitation to you from the Holy One: 'Come unto Me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you'; and lest you say you are too sinful and cannot come, the next word reminds you how God has opened the way, and made it possible;—'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,

to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' And then comes the testimony of a man who has heard, and believed, and tested it for himself ;—' This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' Finally, lest you say you have so repeatedly failed you are ashamed to come again, you have the gracious reminder that the Saviour who died for you now lives to intercede for you ;—' If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins.' And swiftly on that reminder comes the cry, ' Lift up your hearts,' and, made bold by the Presence of the Advocate, we humbly and gladly reply, ' We lift them up unto the Lord.' Then we proceed to make our second offering ; linked with one another on earth, and with the Angels and ' all the Company of Heaven ' we offer our thanks, our praises, our adoration, in fact all our spiritual possessions."

"How simply splendid, Aunt Betty; I am so glad you showed me those two offerings. Then come the special Prefaces for great festivals; those of course are obviously needed; and after them we reach the supreme point. What can you tell me of the Prayer of Humble Access, and the Consecration Prayer?"

The girl looked eagerly at her aunt, who sat for some moments in silence gazing into the fire before she turned and very quietly replied: "First I must remind you I am only expected to pass on to you what this means to me. Just as I believe that in Bethlehem on the first Christmas Day 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,' so I believe that now God comes to us in the form of bread and wine. I cannot believe the consecrated bread is only a token, for St. Paul says, 'he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation (or judgment) to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body.' These solemn words might deter us from communicating at all

were it not that our Lord Himself commanded us to do so; it is therefore greater presumption to stay away from His altar than to come. Moreover, the fact that we recognise the solemnity of the act shows we *do* 'discern the Lord's Body,' therefore the judgment is not for us. To me, the Bread points to Bethlehem, to the Incarnation:—'a body hast Thou prepared Me,' 'I am the living Bread which came down from Heaven.' And the Wine points to Calvary where that perfect life was willingly offered as a sacrifice for sin; 'except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you.' See how complete is the salvation taught by this Blessed Sacrament it is for body as well as soul. In the past some, who ardently loved the Christ, have thought they must neglect, and even cruelly illtreat, their bodies to fit themselves for His service; but in our prayer of Humble Access we ask 'that our sinful bodies may be made clean by His Body,' and in the words of administration the

priest says, 'The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . preserve thy body and soul.' We receive Him then into our bodies for purification, and for healing and strength; our minds, which hear the words and meditate upon them, are enlightened; and our souls and spirits receive Life more abundant. Browning so beautifully expresses what I am trying to say:—

'Let us not always say,
"Spite of this flesh to-day
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole."
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry, "All good things
Are ours," nor soul helps flesh more now than flesh helps soul.'

"Even to-day many teach that illness and disease must be patiently borne as God's will for us; yet Jesus Christ, who became Incarnate to reveal to us the mind and will of the Father, went about healing all manner of disease; and never did He send away unsatisfied any

who came to Him for healing, or suggest to them that physical suffering was God's plan for them. It is true he did not heal all the sick whom He saw. Others lay at the pool of Bethesda beside the impotent man who was made to walk; and surely He must often have passed by the cripple whom St. Peter healed at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. Is it not the same with the soul? Truths we have heard since childhood pass our ears unheeded, till one day it seems that our eyes are opened, and we see the Christ, and words long familiar live with pregnant meaning, and our hearts are glad, and our lives are changed. With body and soul there comes a moment when, as it were, the good seed falls on prepared ground and becomes effective. Not only does the Sacrament point to the past and bring to our remembrance the price and perfectness of our salvation, but it gives us strength to serve our Lord and Master in the present, and it points to the future, for St. Paul says 'Ye do show the Lord's death till

He come.' Notice too, how individual it is; —'The Blood of our Jesus Christ which was shed for *thee* . . . '; but straightway comes the Lord's Prayer, summing up all our worship in the words He Himself taught us, beginning '*Our* Father.' Here again we have the great truth that any revelation of God comes to each one individually, but it is for the edification of all. I am trying to say what St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, '. . . the Head, even Christ; from Whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.' "

"Aunt Betty, that is an awfully solemn thought;—'that which every joint supplieth.' It implies that if I am a Christian at all, the Body of Christ will gain or suffer according to whether, or not, His life is having free course through me to other 'joints'."

"I really think that is so. The comfort is

that God planned it, and therefore it must be practicable. Sometimes when I feel I am doing nothing definite for Christ it is a comfort to remember that all unconsciously His love and life are passing through me, simply because I am a member of His Body. The very fact that our minds think of Him causes thoughts of Him to arise in other minds.

"And now we come to the Lord's Prayer. We cannot stop to discuss it in detail, for that would take many hours, but how gloriously fitting that it should come just there! When words fail us to express our aspirations, adoration, and thanksgiving, how naturally we turn to that prayer, containing the very plan of a Christian life. And then, Mollie, in the Prayer of Oblation which follows the Lord's Prayer, we come to the third offering;—our bodies, now cleansed and sanctified by His Body and Blood. In the words 'here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively

sacrifice unto Thee' we add the final gift of a three-fold sacrifice: our material possessions, our worship, ourselves."

Mollie sat very still and silent, and Lady Benton presently turned to her and said: "There is one question I want to ask you; does it jar at all upon you that in the concluding Gloria we three times ask the Saviour to have mercy upon us?"

"Jar? Oh, no. Why do you ask that?"

"Twice I have heard it remarked that to pray for mercy at the close of the Communion Service was utterly unsuitable, and implied a cringing fear of an offended God."

"Aunt Betty! how astonishing! After our minds have been led, as you have shown me, to dwell upon the unspeakable love shown at Bethlehem and Calvary; and as we have been reminded of the glorious vocation for each Christian, how can we but be conscious of our own unworthiness and insufficiency, and it seems as natural to link with our thanksgiving

a petition for mercy, as for the flowers to lift their heads in grateful appreciation of the dew."

"I am glad you said that, Mollie; it so exactly expresses my own feeling. To my mind there is perfect sequence from that Gloria to the seal upon the service,—the Benediction:—

"'The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you always.—Amen.'"

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